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The Noble Lord

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

New Brunswick woodsmen bow to the
memory of an Englishman with a monocle

ALL FISHERMEN, of course, are liars; yet sometimes innocently so. One who goes to New Brunswick to fish for salmon may deliberately conceal from his wife the cost of the trip; but when he enlarges upon the size and number of his fish and the difficulty of their capture, he is often as much deceived by his own memories as are his hearers by his words.

But the noble lord, the Earl of Postilby, lied with intent. He wrote to Jack Thompson that he would come to fish for salmon; and this was simply not true. Yet Jack believed him, and—since it is Jack's business and pleasure to lead fishermen to fish—he made every possible preparation to give the noble lord good sport, and on the appointed day drove fifty miles to meet the earl's train.

The noble lord proved to be a tall, somewhat stooped young man with a pale wisp of mustache and a weary eye behind his monocle. M'lord—the appellation, from the first, appeared to fit him like an old glove—said, "Hah!" to Jack's greeting; and when they were upon the road, M'lord appeared to sleep till they came to the river and Jack's camp.

At the dinner table Jack opened a discussion of plans. The season was late, but there were still fish in the river; and for M'lord, Jack had been able to secure the courtesies of certain sacred pools on club waters. He explained all this.

"So even if it is late," Jack promised, "you ought to kill some salmon."

"Hah, yes!" M'lord barked, and he blinked behind his monocle. "Heard of a chap once," he said vaguely, "who went up this river and across to another and came down that." He looked at Jack enquiringly.

"You'd have to go by canoe," Jack explained. "You wouldn't get many salmon in the upper waters, and the trip would take about three weeks."

"Good," said M'lord. "I'll do that. Start tomorrow." Jack was a little dismayed to have his plans so abruptly overthrown. He protested mildly: "You wouldn't get much fishing, M'lord." And thinking of the other's mountain of luggage, considering practical difficulties, he added: "You'd have to take two or three canoes."

"Rubbish!" M'lord protested without heat. "Not such

an ass as I look, you know. Had no notion what I'd need, so I brought the lot, that's all. Let you pick and choose, leave the rest here."

Jack began to suspect that his preconceptions about M'lord had been wrong. Studying the other man, he realized suddenly that though M'lord peered sleepily through his monocle, bobbing his long neck in a fashion curiously like that of a near-sighted camel, yet his cheek was bronzed. Not merely sunburned or tanned, but deeply colored, as though M'lord were used to long exposure to the sun; no novice in the wilderness.

Yet Jack was worried, conscious of his responsibility for M'lord's safety. "Ever travel in a canoe?"

"Done a bit of punting on the Thames; handle a pole and all that."

Jack did not smile. "I see. Done much fishing?"

NOW JACK himself had hunted and fished in most countries where good hunting and fishing can be had; and this simple question set them off upon a two-hour exchange of experiences. Jack had made three African *safaris*; it developed that M'lord had shot his elephant, his lion and his buffalo—and been mauled by a leopard besides. Each had killed his tiger; and each had harled for salmon in Norwegian fiords, and each had lost tackle to the fierce trout of New Zealand, and tried for deep-sea monsters off the coasts there, and taken trout in Kashmir, and mahseer in India, and had sport with red steenbras and with white off Capetown. M'lord had caught dorado in the Uruguay, and Jack had not, and heard those great tales enviously, and the long talk ran on and on, till Jack said at last, respectfully:

"Well, M'lord, you've certainly covered some territory. Must be pretty keen at it."

M'lord barked sharply, in that way he had. "Hah!" he said. "No! Not half! But my father was, in his day. I've been trying to find out what the old gentleman saw in it, that's all. Been following his back track for six years now. Everywhere he went." He added in a different tone: "He came up here, twenty odd years ago. Thought I'd try it myself, that's all."

"Twenty years? That would be before my day," Jack remarked. "But the old-timers will remember him. He'd be—well, everyone would have known about him."

M'lord looked at him in a curiously blank fashion. "No, not likely," he said. "He was the younger son, y'know. The last earl was my uncle. Bachelor. My father never succeeded to the title."

Jack nodded sympathetically. "I see. He must have been a sportsman, your father."

M'lord said briefly: "Don't remember much about him."

Jack, like most men used to the wilderness, is quick to trust those vague, intangible feelings, hunches, call them what you please, which all men occasionally feel. He understood that M'lord did not care for further talk about his father. Also he had an uneasy certainty that he had heard something discreditable, somewhere, long ago, about the brother of the old earl; so he did not pursue the subject. They turned to the immediate business at hand; the selection of duffel and gear to go in the canoe.

M'lord had half a dozen salmon rods, tremendous weapons fifteen, seventeen, twenty feet long; but Jack, after he had inspected them, said doubtfully:

"They're bigger than we use up here. They're built for bank fishing in your English rivers; but here we fish from a canoe, or sometimes wade. Have you anything smaller?"

M'lord nodded. "I've a small rod my father had made to use one-handed, after he lost his hand, y'know. But, of course, he never used it."

And he brought out the rod in question. It proved to be a full thirteen feet long; too heavy to cast with one hand unless the user were a giant of a man. But it would have to serve. Jack was too good a fisherman to lend a rod; and M'lord was a man of too much sensibility to borrow one.

After Jack was abed that night he began vaguely to suspect that M'lord was not wholly intent upon catching salmon; and he wondered a little what was in the other's mind.

He would remember M'lord's remark that his father had lost one hand.

NEXT MORNING the noble lord settled his long legs in the bow of Mat Houston's canoe; and Mat shoved off, set his pole, and thrust the bow upstream. There was no better guide than Mat anywhere on the river.

"But all the same, Mat," Jack had urged this morning, "watch yourself. Don't take chances; and—don't let him get himself into a jam. If anything happened to him, it would give the whole province a black eye."

Mat grinned reassuringly. "What c'd happen?" he challenged. "Nothing to hurt a man anywhere up here."

"You'll hit some bad water," Jack reminded him. "If it rains, Two-Mile Sluice is bad. If the water's over the split rock, make him walk down the bank."

Mat spat and nodded. "I'll drynurse him like a sick kitten, Jack," he promised. "I'll make him wash behind the ears, keep his teeth brushed and everything."

Jack smiled secretly. He himself had at first appraised M'lord contemptuously—as Mat did now; and he thought



Mat might learn a lesson before his weeks of daily contact with M'lord were done. Also he considered sharing with Mat his suspicion that M'lord had in coming here some secret purpose; but he decided against doing so, said only:

"Well, I'm holding you responsible."

Mat grinned, and said: "Sure, be easy." Nevertheless, as he poled the canoe steadily up river he took for a while more than usual care—and as a natural consequence he grounded on rocks that should not have been where they were, and lost his grip on the bottom in little runs that should have been ridiculously simple; and before the morning was half done, he was sweating hot and breathing hard.

The worst of it was, M'lord hardly spoke. He sat in the bow, and puffed a great pipe, and stared straight ahead; and when Mat now and then said some word—"See the buck on the bank ahead!" "There's a young muskrat in that eddy." "Woodchuck on that dead log." "A good salmon rose in the bend." M'lord said only, "Hah!" and puffed his pipe a little harder. That was all.

But at noon, Mat put the canoe's nose against the bank and stepped ashore to boil the kettle; and M'lord, surprisingly, began to talk a little. Not much; but that little was better than silence.

He said: "Cabins along the river?"

"Sporting camps and the guardians' shanties," Mat explained; and—grateful for a chance to talk—he added: "There's a guardian on every two miles of river till we get above club waters."

"Guardians?"

"Sure," Mat agreed. "They've got a system. Each one makes a report once a week on every canoe that passes, up or down. That way, the chief can check and be sure his men are on the job. If Wes Hunt and Jim Ferguson both saw us pass, and Pat Howes, in between them, missed us,

the chief will be after Pat to know where he was when we came by."

M'lord puffed his pipe, and Mat dropped a handful of tea into the boiling water and set it off the fire; he propped bread to toast, and M'lord asked:

"They'd know if a man came up river—say twenty years ago? Or—eight, or ten?"

"Dunno as they keep the records," Mat confessed, made a little curious by the other's tone. "Not that long. But if he took a fish, they'd know it."

"Hah!" said M'lord, and ate his toast and bacon and jam and drank his tea, and they went on.

In mid-afternoon M'lord asked: "Man named Courtney? Did he come up here, a few years ago?"

Mat climbed the pole, recovered, set it again before he answered. "Don't remember him," he reflected. "And I've been on the river since I was fourteen. That's thirteen years. I might not know the name."

"He might not use it," M'lord confessed.

"Why wouldn't he?" Mat asked; but M'lord did not answer, and Mat was sorry for his question.

AT HALF-PAST FOUR they went ashore and landed at the gear, and then pushed off again to try for a salmon at the head of a still pool. At half after five, Mat put in to the bank again.

"I'll get the tent up, and we'll eat, and try them after," he explained.

M'lord made no protest; and he watched Mat pitch the tent. Then Mat went into the brush for a load of browse for M'lord's bed; and when he returned M'lord had launched the canoe, anchored it in position, and was casting.

Mat called sharply: "Better come ashore, M'lord. There's a trick to handling a canoe!"

"Done some punting on the Thames," M'lord retorted.



M'lord laid the box among the old grey bones.

and cast, and his rod bowed beautifully. "I'm into him," he said.

Mat swore. The canoe was in deep water. The salmon started downstream. "Twitch up the anchor," Mat called hurriedly. "Put your foot on the rope. Drop your tip and give slack. Take the pole and set the canoe in toward the bar. I'll wade out and catch you as you drift down."

Five minutes later, wet to the waist and furiously angry, he scrambled over the gunwale. The salmon was, for the water, a small one; about nine pounds. When it was gaffed and they came again ashore, Mat spoke his wrath.

"Now listen, mister," he said briefly. "You may be the King, in England; and the Queen, too, for all I care. But up here you're just a sport, and I'm responsible for you.

Mat, standing erect in the stern of the canoe, manipulat-

You'd have laughed to see me running along beside the river, cussing M'lord, and cussing the river and yelling at him what to do.

Illustrated by Dudley Gloyne Summers

ing his pole with a monotonous and tireless patience all day long, nevertheless began to enter into the other man's mind. M'lord spoke often of the vastness of this wilderness and how a man might if he chose lose himself for ever here; and Mat always demurred.

"Not as easy as you'd think," he said. "It ain't like in town. Man passes your house in town, you might not notice; but up here if a man goes by, you wonder who he is and where he's going and when he'll be back."

"He might walk through the woods. Keep out of sight."

"Wouldn't get far," Mat argued. "Hard going, through the woods."

"Travel by night, then."

The guide grinned. "The guardians keep full as tight a watch at night as they do by day," he insisted. "No, he'd not sneak by."

"Well, suppose a man did come up river, on lawful business, and they knew it—and he never came back. What then?"

"They'd find him."

"Needle in a haystack," M'lord suggested.

"You'd be surprised. No, sir; not as easy as you'd think, to hide up here."

M'lord reverted again and again to his thesis that a man wishing so to do could hide himself for ever in this great wilderness. Mat as persistently rejected the possibility.

"Not if they were after him," he declared. "Not if there was them that wanted to find him. It might take time; but up here, there's plenty of time. No, sir; he wouldn't have a chance, with the Mounted on his trail."

"Well, I didn't mean to say the police were after him, y'know."

"Then why would he want to hide?" Mat challenged.

M'lord hesitated for a time before replying; and Mat remembered that a similar question had been left unanswered once before. But after an interval, a dozen strokes of the pole, M'lord moved and spoke.

"Well, y'know," he said then, "I knew a chap once who did that. I mean to say, bounced off no one knew where and—never came back. This chap had been up here once. I've been thinking of him, wondering if he could have come up here and hidden away." And he added, in a curious tone: "Name of Courtney. But I asked you about him the first day."

"What was the matter with him?" Mat persisted.

M'lord seemed to scan the narrowing river ahead; but he did not answer, did not for an hour or two thereafter speak at all.

Yet from that moment Mat was sure that M'lord had come here to look for the man named Courtney; and two nights later, M'lord spoke of the matter again.

They were crossing the height of land; a short portage tomorrow would bring them to the headwaters of the stream that would in due course carry them on its strong flowing waters down to journey's end. And after supper by the firelight, without prompting or preamble, M'lord told the story of the man named Courtney; thus belatedly answered the question Mat had asked two days before.

THIS CHAP Courtney," he said, puffing at his pipe. "When the Big Show started, he might have had a commission like a shot; but not he. He went into the ranks; but being what he was, he didn't stay there long. Once you got the first step, promotion was just a question of doing your job and staying alive. In the spring of 1916 he was a major."

M'lord hesitated behind a cloud of smoke and then went on: "He pulled his men out of a position, in the spring drive. Left a hole in the line, and Jerry found it and came through, and things were bad for a while. Courtney wouldn't say a word in his own defense. Court martial called it cowardice under fire. He'd have been stood up against a wall, but he had friends. So they drummed him out; dishonorable discharge."

M'lord's voice was carefully level and calm. "After he left hospital—he'd stopped a shell fragment—he dropped out of sight. I was a nipper then, eight years old, but I remember all about it. Five years after, his brother died and he came into—a bit of property. Lawyers tried to find him; hunted all over the world. No go. That was nineteen twenty-one."

"Then seven years after that, the man who had been his Commanding Officer died. Left a letter confessing he'd ordered Courtney to retreat that day. When he saw the mess he'd made, the old boy got the wind up, let Courtney take the blame. And Courtney took it. Never squeaked."

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Mat said something violent under his breath.

"Righto," M'lord assented. "Seemed so to me! And to everyone else. But the old boy was dead, and according to law, Courtney was dead, too. Something about seven years absence, or some such tosh. As if a man was bound to be dead just because you didn't know where he was!"

"Yes, Courtney was dead as a herring, the lawyers said. So there was a posthumous decoration, ceremonies, this and that, medal for his widow and so on."

There was a curious blankness in his tone; and Mat, though he was a bold and fearless man, shivered as though he were afraid.

"Lot of good that did Courtney," he offered. "And him dead!"

"But was he dead?" M'lord suggested. "Chap in disgrace might go off somewhere and never be heard of afterward. He might have come up here."

Mat said, almost gently: "If he did, I never heard of him."

M'lord nodded, with a curious weariness. "No," he assented; and he rose.

"This man named Courtney," Mat suggested. "If he was alive, and you could get word to him that that old business was straightened out, he'd be glad to hear it, probably."

"He was married," said M'lord in an absent tone. "Had a son. Yes, he'd be glad!"

And he moved off to the tent. But Mat stayed a while longer by the dying fire, staring into the flames.

ON THE third day after that, they met Charlie Frame. Charlie was a lumberman, employed by the company that logged the headwaters. In summer he and his crew repaired booms and drove piles and put in cribwork and patched up dams to prepare the river for the next year's drive. In the fall his crew swamped roads; in the winter they felled the great trees and snaked them to the rollways; in the spring they helped take the drive downstream. Charlie was a man past fifty. With his hat on, he looked to be a robust thirty-five. He had been on the river almost forty years; and he had a cabin far up river—where M'lord and Mat Houston stopped one day.

And they stayed there that night; and M'lord and Charlie Frame had talk together. Mat Houston, while they talked, kept his tongue between his teeth and his eyes upon the fire. This was not his business; and there was no call for him to speak. But on the other hand, he missed not a word.

He observed that M'lord said nothing at all about a man named Courtney, but he pursued his favorite topic, the suggestion that a man desiring to hide for ever from the world might come into this wilderness and disappear.

Charlie Frame said—as Mat had said before him—that such a thing was not possible. "Hasn't been a man come above Two-Mile Sluice in thirty years and me not know it," he declared. "I've known when he come, and when he went back. If he did."

M'lord turned his head and his monocle caught the firelight like a mirror and gleamed red. "If he did. But suppose he didn't?" he suggested.

Charlie Frame replied: "Then I'd know how he got killed, and where we buried him." He added, like an amendment: "Or where we found his bones." Mat Houston saw that some memory had stirred in Charlie. "Like the skeleton of Six-Mile Gulch," he said.

M'lord filled his pipe and puffed it hard; but Mat saw that his eyes suddenly were keen.

"Take that fellow, now," Charlie Frame reflected without prompting, his voice

falling, as a man's voice falls when he speaks of tragic, half-forgotten things. "It was late November when he come up river," he said. "He come alone in a canoe, and Two-Mile Sluice got him. The river was high; and his pole slipped, halfway up Two-Mile; and he went slinchwise off a rock, and his canoe broke in two. He grabbed his rifle and cartridge belt as he went over the side. His axe stuck in the stern somehow, and it drifted ashore below; and his b'iling kettle floated right side up. That was everything he saved. That and the wet clothes he had on. I had a camp at the forks two miles above the Sluice, and he made it up there along the bank; come there that night half froze, half dead."

M'lord, through smoke clouds, watched him. Mat Houston watched M'lord.

"Know his name?" M'lord enquired.

Charlie shook his head. "We fed him and dried his clothes and I offered him a job," he said. "No go. I asked him who he was; and he said: 'I'm just an old Frenchman from Lake St. John.'" Charlie's eyes were shrewd. "But you can tell a Frenchman from Lake St. John as far as you can hear him talk. This man talked English as good as me." He spat. "And a sight better," he amended. "Whoever he was, he wasn't an old Frenchman from Lake St. John any more than he was a Chinaman."

"Quite," said M'lord. "And he didn't take the job?"

"He went on," Charlie replied. "Took his rifle—a good one, that was; engraving on the lock and barrel, too, and a place on the butt where a plate with initials had come off—and his axe and his kettle and some flour and bacon and coffee that he was bound he'd pay me for, and went on up river. Said he was going to run a line of traps, stay all winter."

He went on, almost resentfully: "I tried to make him take an outfit in place of the one he'd lost; but he was stubborn, wouldn't take only what he could pay for. Two-Mile had stripped him clean. If he'd had what he started with, he'd have wintered all right; but as it was—well, Two-Mile got him." He added in a lower tone: "I tried to locate him in the spring, but I couldn't. Never did know what happened to him till I found his bones in Six-Mile Gulch four years afterward."

M'LOD filled his pipe again. After a long time he asked, almost gently: "Who killed him?"

"He died," said Charlie. "Froze, maybe. Or took sick. He died in his bed, what there was of it. I was cruising up the Gulch, and I happened to walk right on to the cabin he'd built. You couldn't have got into it without stooping over. Maybe five feet high inside, no window, a door you had to crawl to get into. Fireplace and chimney of rocks and clay. Poles and sod for a roof. He'd had boughs for a bed, on the floor, and died on it. The roof was falling in. The bones were scattered some. It was the rifle I knew him by. That and the axe and the kettle. All rusted away; but I'd had a good look at the rifle. I could tell it. It was him."

He added: "He must have died that first winter, by the looks of the bones." And he put fresh chunks on the fire. "I collected what there was and piled some rocks on it," he said. "Seemed kind of pitiful to leave 'em so."

"Quite," M'lord agreed. His tones were dry. He looked at Charlie Frame. "You wouldn't care to show me the place?"

"Can, as well as not," Charlie declared. "It's down below here." He added: "Not that there's anything left to see."

M'lord said only: "Hah!"

So next day Charlie went down river with them; and the day after, Charlie and Mat and M'lord fought a way up Six-Mile Gulch and found, two hours hard going

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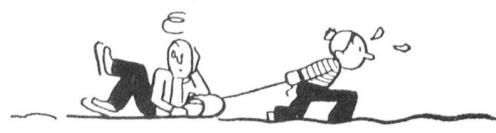
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from the river, a heap of rotted logs that had been a cabin, and a little monument of rocks neatly piled.

"That's it," said Charlie Frame.

M'lord for a little while did not move or speak; he stood looking at the pile of rocks. But then he did a curious thing. He removed the stones in the little cairn, and found the rusted rifle, the axe head, a few grey bones. He rearranged the bones with a grave gentleness. Then, without explanation, ignoring the fact that Charlie and Mat Houston watched him wonderingly, he took something from his pocket.

Mat saw it clearly; a small, flat lead box, soldered tight.

He laid this box among the old grey bones; and then, almost tenderly, he replaced the stones of the cairn again. Charlie Frame and Mat looked at each other in a deep curiosity—but they asked no questions. It had begun to rain.

M'lord said, humbly, appealingly: "I'll stay a few minutes, overtake you. You two go along."

So they started the return trip to the river. Once Mat looked back and saw that M'lord stood bareheaded by the little cairn. Then the forest hid him.

A little farther on, they waited till he came up with them. It was raining hard. Back at their sodden camp, M'lord asked one more question. "Two-Mile Sluice? That's below us?"

"Four miles," Charlie agreed.

"If he hadn't lost his outfit there, he—might not have died."

"Well, he'd have had a better chance, sure," Charlie assented.

M'lord nodded, and went into the tent. Mat and Charlie squatted under the shelter of a lean-to hastily thrown up and thatched with hemlock boughs; and they asked one another all the questions they had not dared ask M'lord.

Then night came down. The rain held hard. Mat heard the flooded river begin to rise.

AT TEN O'CLOCK next morning, Mat and M'lord—Charlie had returned up river—came to the head of Two-Mile Sluice. The split rock was under water. That meant the Sluice would be boiling, angry, dangerous. Jack Thompson had warned Mat to have M'lord walk down the bank if there were danger here, but Mat did not suggest this. He was afraid to. He had spoken to M'lord once this day, and been answered curtly; and Mat suddenly was in a hurry to be home. Without hesitation, he drove into the head of the Sluice.

Two miles of water, deep, strong, boiling and eddying and sucking and buffeting, ridden by great curving steeds of foam like breakers on a beach; and here and there the snarling teeth of boulders ripped the flood. Two miles; a scant six minutes. Then they came into the bliss of slower water; and Mat poled ashore to unload and dump their canoe.

On shore, M'lord spoke. "That's Two-Mile Sluice?"

"That's her."

"Pitch the tent," said M'lord gently. "We're staying here tonight."

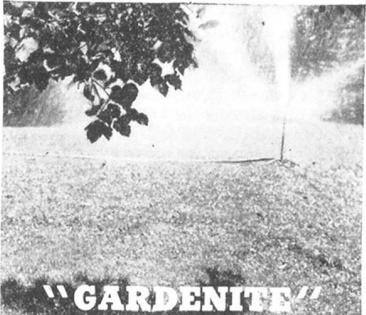
Mat made some protest, not effectual. M'lord was sweetly reasonable, but not to be shaken. Mat pitched the tent; and M'lord asked, nodding toward the river: "Could you pole up through that?"

"Some parts," Mat admitted. "Keeping close to the banks. There's three-four places I'd have to carry."

"We'll take the canoe back up," M'lord announced. "I want to make that trip down through again." He added: "Clever job you did."

Mat hesitated, but flattery persuaded him. Part of the way up Two-Mile Sluice he poled; several times he waded, towing the canoe; and thrice for a few rods he carried it on his shoulders. When after the last carry he put it down and slid it into the water, they were at the head of the Sluice. Mat held the canoe, bade M'lord get in.

But M'lord said: "I'll take it down alone."

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Mat grinned, shook his head. "You'd never make it."

"Done some punting on the Thames," M'lord said mildly.

Mat said, half angry: "This isn't the Thames! Get in. I'll take her through."

"I'd like to try it," M'lord urged. "I'll take the responsibility."

"You're crazy!" Mat insisted. "Get in!"

M'lord murmured gently: "Sorry, old man." His fist caught Mat neatly, and Mat's knees ceased to function and Mat sat down hard.

When his vision cleared, he saw M'lord poling out toward the quickening current; and Mat staggered to his feet and shouted: "Come back!" But then he saw it was too late for that; and he cupped his hands and hawled: "Sit down! Paddle, not pole!"

M'lord heard; he sat down. Mat, running along the shore, saw the canoe tip into the first pitch; saw it swing crazily. The current caught it broadside and rolled it over and over, across a gravel bar—to Mat's very feet. Mat grappled it, M'lord got footing, and between them they hauled it clear.

MAT SAW, with reluctant respect, that M'lord had held fast to the paddle. They carried the canoe ashore and then Mat turned to the other man.

"Now," he said grimly, "I'm going to teach you who's boss of this outfit." And he came in, head down, fists cocked.

M'lord protested: "Don't do that, Mat. No use, really, y'know." And even as he spoke he deflected Mat's right with a tap on the wrist, stepped inside it, and—Mat sat down hard and spat out a flake of tooth.

"No use, really," M'lord repeated. "Have a bit of sense, old man."

"I'll knock your head off!" Mat threatened, trying to rise.

"Not leading with your right, Mat," M'lord said kindly. "It isn't done, y'know. But suppose you did; I'm still going to stay here till I run the Sluice alone. Why not show me how?"

"What's the idea?" Mat protested, coming uncertainly to his feet.

"Call it that I'm sorry for that chap, Courtney," M'lord said vaguely. "This bit of river did him in. I want to teach it manners, that's all."

"You'll bust the canoe, leave us stranded here."

"We can walk out."

"You'll get yourself drowned."

"Hah! I've done some punting on the Thames. Need to learn the knack, that's all."

Mat threw up his hands. "All right, be a blasted fool!" he said. "Come on. We'll carry it up to the head again." They lifted the canoe between them. "Swim, can you?" he challenged.

"Oh, rather!"

"Well, don't try to or you'll drown. If you fall out, go with the current. Keep your head upstream if you can; hit the rocks with your feet. And with the canoe, keep her in the main current, except at the big rock halfway down. Swing her to the right of that. You'll have to back paddle on the right all the way down the run above to get her over to that side. If you don't, you're sunk sure."

"Thanks," said M'lord. "I'll remember."

They set the canoe down above the Sluice again, but higher upstream this time than before. Mat put a rock in the bow.

"That will make her ride better," he said. "The place to hit the Sluice is beyond that boil in the middle. There's a split rock ten feet upstream from the boil. Get on the other side of that."

M'lord smiled approvingly. "Good man," he said. "Thanks."

"You're crazy," Mat told him angrily; but then he grinned. "I'm crazy, too, I guess, to let you try it. Wait till I get a start down the bank," he said. "So I'll have a chance to pull you out again. Good luck, you blasted fool!"

M'lord chuckled. "A pair of us, what?" he suggested. "Both blasted fools."

"Sure!" Mat confessed. "But I'll bet you get away with it, at that." And he set out at a trot down the shore.

But once he laughed. "Punting on the Thames!" he said aloud, and laughed again.

MAT LIKES nowadays to tell the tale of the next three days. He told it to Jack Thompson a week later, after they were safe back at the base camp, and after M'lord had gone. While he stayed, no word had been spoken of the thing they had done together. M'lord departed; and Jack drove him to the train and returned; and then Mat told Jack the tale from first to last.

At the end, he said by way of summary: "So that's the whole of it. He tried it four times the first day, got dumped every time, finally cut his head open on a rock that knocked him goofy so he couldn't have another try that day.

"But next morning—the water was worse—he went at it again, and I helped him. Both of us a couple of lunatics trying to get ourselves drowned.

"He cracked a rib, I think, the first time he got spilled that second day; but he wouldn't quit. I don't know about the rib; but I know he sprained his wrist, because it puffed up, and I had to strap it tight so he could handle the paddle. You'd have laughed to see me running along beside the river, cussing him, and cussing the river, and yelling at him what to do. Oh, I was crazy, too.

"But by Godfrey, we licked it, Jack! He made it, the first run in the afternoon, that second day.

"I'd have quit then; but not him. He wasn't satisfied. The next try, he got spilled right at the foot. But the third day, he ran the Sluice five times, and never a spill. And then he was satisfied to start for home."

So Mat finished the tale; and he added guiltily: "I know what you told me, Jack; and I tried to argue with him. He knocked me over twice. Maybe I couldn't have stopped him anyway; but his knocking me down wasn't the reason I let him do it. I got so I wanted him to do it. I was as crazy as him before the end."

Jack Thompson nodded thoughtfully. "Tell me again," he suggested, "why he wanted to do it."

"Because it was the Sluice that killed Courtney," Mat explained. "Anyway, M'lord figured it so. You know what I think? I think he came up here looking for that man. He kept asking me about Courtney, till Charlie Frame showed us that skeleton in Six-Mile Gulch."

And he said: "Another thing, the day we left the Sluice, after we licked it, M'lord looked back, and he said, sort of to himself: 'Brave bones, rest easy now!' He grinned, confessed: "It kind of made me cry."

Jack remarked: "M'lord says he's through with fishing and hunting from now on. Says he's going to stay in England, marry, take his seat in the House of Lords, and all that."

Mat chuckled. "Well," he said. "He may have been a lord when he went up river, but he came back a man."

Jack nodded. "Did you talk to Charlie Frame about the dead man?" he asked.

"Sure. That night after M'lord went to bed."

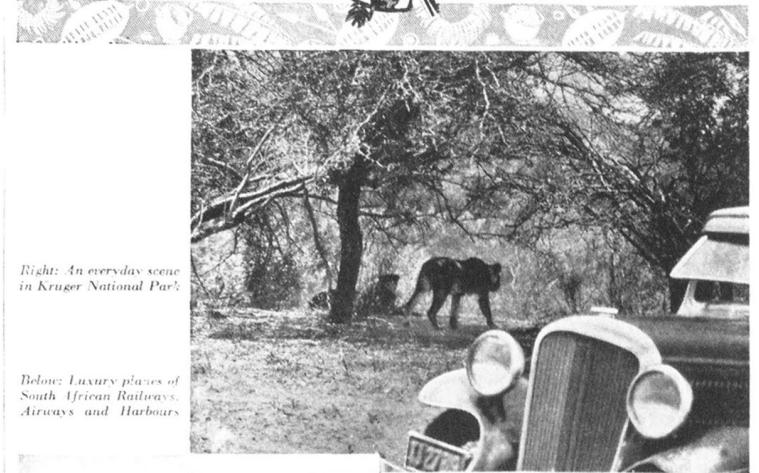
"Did he say anything about Courtney's being crippled?"

Mat looked at him in surprise. "How'd you know?" he demanded.

"What was it?" Jack insisted, in a hushed tone.

"Why, Charlie said it was a wonder Courtney could get along at all," Mat explained. "Said he had a leather loop on his left arm to help him hold the paddle or the pole. You see, the old man had lost one hand."

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